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Assyria in Classical Universal Histories

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## ABHANDLUNGEN

### ASSYRIA IN CLASSICAL UNIVERSAL HISTORIES

Universal historiography had few exponents in Classical Greece and Rome. Most historians labored in the more familiar fields of national history, and the few historians who chose to deal with τὰ καθόλου met with limited success. Not until the Middle Ages did the writing of universal history become a popular exercise.

There were various reasons for this slight attention to universal history: Information concerning barbarian peoples was meager; history was obliged to entertain and to edify, rather than to unfold the past; no over-riding teleological presupposition urged the Classical writer to gather together the apparently unrelated eras and areas of past experience. An equally important limitation on universal historiography was the difficulty encountered in reconciling the Greek view of antiquity with the traditions of the Eastern peoples. Preconceptions about history and chronology could be altered, and were, in the face of new information. But the evolution of Greek and Roman views on the remote past was slow, and was worked out within the trammels of assumptions which established a chronological framework destined to remain long after the preconceptions themselves had been shrugged off by historians.

The legends and information about Assyria appear to have been a significant factor in the formation and crystallization of this chronological framework. The Late Assyrian Empire, commencing with Ashur-dan II, dominated the Near East from 932 until 612 B.C. Syria, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt fell under its rule, and reverberations of its struggles affected the peoples of Asia Minor, among them the Greeks. The sixth century Milesian, Phocylides, assumed that his countrymen had heard of Nineveh and the Assyrians.<sup>1</sup> But the memory of the Late Assyrian Empire was all but effaced by its Chaldaean and Medo-Persian successors. Xenophon and the 10000 marched by the ruin of Nineveh in total ignorance of its identity.<sup>2</sup>

Curiosity, however, remained. In his travels Herodotus had heard much about the Assyrians, and had promised to write of them.<sup>3</sup> But his Assyrian *logoi* never materialized, and the information which he did pass on to his public was scattered and sparse. He spoke of Assyria as a nation which had ruled Asia for 520 years, its hegemony being inherited by the Medes.<sup>4</sup> A low interpretation of Herodotus' chronological references would place this Assyrian

<sup>1</sup> Phocylides, F 4 (ed. Diehl).

<sup>2</sup> *Anab.*, III, 4, 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> I, 184.

<sup>4</sup> I, 95.

hegemony at 1219–699 B.C. He mentioned Ninus, Semiramis, Sennacherib and Sardanapalus without attempting to fix the succession of Assyrian monarchs. Herodotus had barely initiated Assyriology when his findings were augmented by Hellanicus, who argued for the existence of two kings named Sardanapalus, adding that the second Sardanapalus was a most effeminate creature.<sup>5</sup>

But much of this was set aside by Ctesias, the Cnidian who found himself court physician to Artaxerxes II. Ctesias discovered that his countrymen's conceptions of Assyrian history were woefully inadequate, and to correct them he prefaced his *Persica* with a substantial history of Assyria.<sup>6</sup> He settled Ninus as the founder of Nineveh, credited Semiramis, Ninus' consort, with the extension of the empire, and blamed Sardanapalus for its collapse. About each of these monarchs Ctesias knew, and told, fascinating stories.<sup>7</sup> But more important than prosopography was chronology. Ctesias insisted that Herodotus had given the Assyrians less than half their due: their empire had lasted more than 1300 years, ending with the revolt of Arbaces the Mede, 317 years before the accession of Cyrus;<sup>8</sup> Assyrian antiquity, Ctesias argued, far outstretched Greek antiquity. According to the Ctesian chronology, Assyrian rule began some time before 2166 B.C. and ended in 866 B.C. And Ctesias undoubtedly referred to native records as his authority for such startling statements.<sup>9</sup> Ctesias' Assyrian history was not immediately popular; but the conquests of Alexander served to create interest in the East and its past. By the third century Ctesias' *Persica* had established a vulgate tradition of Assyrian history.

Greek involvement in the East inspired native and patriotic historiography. One of the most significant of these native historians was Berossus, who published his *Babyloniaca* ca. 275 B.C. A Chaldaean himself, Berossus set out to correct the Greeks' misapprehensions about Babylon, and thus to enhance the image of the Chaldaeans. Berossus insisted upon distinguishing between Assyrians and Babylonians since they had for too long been regarded by Greek writers as identical or interchangeable. Most of the stories about Semiramis, he charged, were erroneous: she did not found the city of Babylon, lived shortly before the Trojan Wars (instead of ca. 2100 B.C.), and was relatively unimportant.<sup>10</sup> The Assyrians had, of course, been masters of Babylon from time to time, and Berossus included in his *Babyloniaca* those Assyrian dynasties which had exercised authority there. Few of the kings mentioned by Ctesias appeared in the *Babyloniaca*. Instead there were references to such unfamiliar (but

<sup>5</sup> Hellanicus, F 63 (ed. Jacoby).

<sup>6</sup> G. Goossens, "L'histoire d'Assyrie de Ctésias," *Ant. Cl.* IX (1940), pp. 25–45.

<sup>7</sup> Diodorus, II, 1–28 is most illustrative. Ctesias was an artist at embroidery and who le cloth invention; cf. R. Renehan, "Photius on Ctesias," *A. J. P.* LXXXIV (1963), p. 71. A very readable denunciation of Ctesias and his works can be found in A. R. Burn's *Persia and the Greeks* (New York, 1962), pp. 11–13.

<sup>8</sup> Diodorus, II, 28, 8 and 32–34. <sup>9</sup> See appendix. <sup>10</sup> Berossus FF 5 and 8.

historical) names as Pul and Esarhaddon.<sup>11</sup> It is safe to say that Berossus' chronology of the Late Assyrian Empire was similar to that endorsed by Assyriologists today; Berossus showed that Assyrian control of Asia continued far beyond the date proposed by Ctesias.<sup>12</sup> The *Babyloniaca* might have placed the study of Assyrian history on a new footing. But unfortunately Berossus' account went unused until the first century B.C., when specialists began to take note of it. Alexander Polyhistor and writers of *Assyriaca*, such as Abydenus and King Juba of Mauretania, knew Berossus' work; Polybius, Livy and Tacitus did not.<sup>13</sup>

Because the *Babyloniaca* supported Old Testament allusions to Assyrian and Chaldaean history, Josephus and the Christian chronographers used it as a reference work. The Jews, of course, had suffered a very intimate acquaintance with the Assyrians, and consequently possessed information which the Greeks and Romans did not have. According to the Jewish tradition, the Assyrians were descended from Ashur, the grandson of Noah; the great Assyrian empire had been a rather late phenomenon (eighth and seventh centuries B.C.). Like the *Babyloniaca* of Berossus, however, this Jewish tradition hardly affected the views on Assyrian history then prevailing in Greece and Rome.

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There is no reason to think that the average intelligent Greek or Roman was interested in Assyria. But the Assyrian hegemony did raise questions for the mythographer, the chronographer and, eventually, the universal historian.

In the early fifth century the Greeks were, for the most part, complacent in their knowledge that they were descended from gods and heroes of a not too distant past.<sup>14</sup> Heracles, Jason, Perseus and other heroes had ranged over the

<sup>11</sup> Berossus FF 5 and 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Polyhistor F 79; Juba F 4. The similarity between the information given by Berossus and Abydenus prompted Hirschfeld (*R. E.* I, col. 129) to conclude that Abydenus did little more than translate Polyhistor's references to Assyrian history into a pseudo-Ionic dialect. It would appear, however, that Abydenus has at least an original approach to Assyrian history; perhaps he attempted a synthesis, or at least a comparison, of the Ctesian and Berossian traditions. Like Berossus, he spoke of Belus as a creator-God, of Alorus as the first Chaldaean king, of Xisuthrus as the last ante-diluvian king (FF 1-3). Like Ctesias, he knew of only thirty Assyrian kings, last (or second last) of whom was Sardanapalus, and dated the fall of Assyria well before the first Olympiad (Abydenus FF 5 and 7).

<sup>14</sup> The Hesiodic *Catalogues* were still highly regarded. Of special interest is the nest of myths concerning Prometheus, Pandora and Deucalion: Prometheus as the author of civilization, Pandora as the first of womankind, and Deucalion as the second father of all men. It was generally held that Deucalion, son of Prometheus, begot Hellen, whose three sons, Dorus, Xuthus and Aeolus, were the patriarchs of the three Hellenic tribes. Hecataeus (F 13), however, knew a Deucalion-Pronoos-Hellen genealogy. According to the logographer Acusilaus (F 23), the first mortal was the Argive hero, Phoroneus; more

barbarian world, demonstrating Greek superiority over Amazons and Egyptians. The Athenians were sprung from the soil, the Dorians from Heracles, and Hecataeus from some god. No people had a greater or longer history than the Greeks. Egypt could retrace its history only as far as Aegyptus; and there were no other serious contenders. Hecataeus, however, was disabused of his belief in his own divine ancestry, and new stories forced Herodotus to re-examine his ideas on the remote past. Ingenuity put the Assyrians in their place. Herodotus concluded that the founder of Assyrian power, Ninus, was the son of Belus, son of Alcaeus, son of Heracles; and Heracles lived approximately 900 years before the time of Herodotus.<sup>15</sup>

But Ctesias' report of an Assyrian empire stretching back a millenium before the Trojan War was not to be explained by any of Heracles' amorous exploits. Belus, their divine ancestor, had to be contemporary with events far earlier than the Herodotean date for Heracles. The mythographer was obviously placed in a difficult situation by Ctesias' amazing discoveries.<sup>16</sup> Either the traditional chronology of the legendary past would have to be revised, or the legends themselves would have to be discarded. The first alternative was certainly the more attractive. Yet there were those who preferred the second. Eratosthenes, in dating the Trojan War 623 years before the accession of Cyrus, was certainly calculating from data found in the *Persica*.<sup>17</sup> The implication was there that for events of such remote antiquity Oriental tradition was to be preferred to Greek tradition. And by refusing to include in his *Chronographia* any of the pre-Trojan legends Eratosthenes admitted their non-historical nature.<sup>18</sup>

Even before the *Chronographia* was published, however, an important step had been taken toward salvaging the legends. Euhemerus' attempts to demythologize the Age of Cronus and the Titanomachy provided the means to reconcile

commonly, Phoroneus was assigned a mortal father, Inachus. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* I 21 = Migne, PG VIII col. 829) noted that inasmuch as Moses antedated Phoroneus by seven generations, Moses was "older than mankind itself," if one were to believe the stories of the Greeks. Hellanicus seems to have placed Phoroneus in the twentieth generation before the Trojan War (Jacoby, *F. gr. Hist.* I, p. 435). Hellanicus' *Atthis* began with King Ogygus and his flood, an event which Hellanicus dated 1020 years before the first Olympic festival (Julius Africanus F 13, 3 = Migne, PG X, col. 75). According to the third century Parian Marble, Deucalion's flood occurred in the year 1528/7 B.C. According to the calculations of J. Forsdyke, *Greece before Homer: Ancient Chronology and Mythology* (New York, 1957, p. 32), Hecataeus' divine ancestor would have put in his appearance on earth about 1100 B.C.

<sup>15</sup> Herodotus I, 7 and II, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Ctesias was quite aware that his date for the birth of the Assyrian Empire was earlier than any of the traditional dates for Greek prehistory; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* I, 21 = Migne, PG VIII, col. 824, εἰ δὲ τὰ Ἀσσυρίων πολλοὺς ἔτεσι πρεσβύτερα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἀφ' ὧν Κτησίτας λέγει.

<sup>17</sup> Forsdyke, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Apollodorus' *Chronicle* began with the Trojan War. Apparently Castor of Rhodes, in the first century B.C., was the first chronographer to assign dates for the pre-Trojan history of Greece and the East.

Assyrian history and the Greek myths. Euhemerus claimed to have discovered that Zeus was a mortal king and a contemporary of Belus, king of Babylon.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, and in varying versions, Belus became involved in the war between Zeus and the Titans. This conclusion was widely accepted. For the orthodox, Belus, like Cronus and Zeus, was a very real god. For those who adopted Euhemerus' rationalism as well as his chronological scheme, all three were extraordinary men whose lives had shaped history.<sup>20</sup> For both groups Assyria was the pioneer of civilization in Asia, the counterpart to European Greece. Ninus, the first Assyrian king, and Aegialeus, the first king among the Greeks, were contemporaries. Chronographers fixed the accession date of both kings (2123 B.C.).<sup>21</sup>

Within this context of mythographical and chronographical "scholarship" must be measured the achievement of the universal historians in working Assyria into their panorama of the past. With the exception of Herodotus, none of the historians who dealt with τὰ καθόλου were specialists in non-classical history.

Herodotus, who had learned at first hand much of what he knew about Assyria, was certainly confused about Assyrians and Chaldaeans. In addition, he had little or no chronological information on the various Assyrian kings. But there is no doubt that for Herodotus Assyrian history was just as much open to inquiry, ἱστορίη, as was the history of Lydia, or Egypt. *Historie*, however, was not pursued by Herodotus' successors; and the Assyrians, never securely fixed in the Greek reconstruction of the past, lost their precarious foothold in the "historical" past and slipped back through the centuries to a legendary and "pre-historical" position, an eclipse from which they were ultimately rescued by the Christian chronographers.

The first writer whose history had universal pretensions was Ephorus of Cyme, whose *Histories* were published ca. 335 B.C. His contemporary, Anaximenes of Lampsacus, found no difficulty in writing a history of Greece *ab ovo*; he launched his history "with the *Theogonia* and the first generation of mankind."<sup>22</sup> But, unlike Anaximenes, the wide-ranging Ephorus had read Ctesias' *Persica*. Apparently Ephorus was impressed by what he read concerning Assyria.

<sup>19</sup> Diodorus VI, 1, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Castor (F 1) recorded Belus as a contemporary of Ogygus, and of the Cyclopes who forged thunderbolts for use against the Titans. Castor was interested in the East, and wrote an ἀναγραφὴ Βαβυλωνῶς καὶ τῶν θαλασσοκρατησάντων (Suda, s.v. Κάστωρ Ῥόδιος). Thallus, a first century A.D. admirer of Euhemerus, wrote that Ogygus and Belus, king of Assyria, fought on the side of Cronus against Zeus and the so-called gods (Thallus F 2). Abydenus (F 4) located the battle at the Tower of Babel, and cited the confusion of tongues as the unhappy result of the battle.

<sup>21</sup> Castor F 1. By Varro's time (FF 3 and 5, ed. Peter) the date for the Ogygian flood had been raised six centuries from the date assigned it by Hellanicus (from 1796 to ca. 2376 B.C.).

<sup>22</sup> Diodorus XV, 89, 3.

He decided that the barbarians were older than the Greeks,<sup>23</sup> but chose to avoid the problem by opening his history with the Return of the Heraclidae. More than once he cast aspersions at writers who regarded the legends of the pre-Trojan Aegean as material susceptible to historical research. Whether he included in his own work a résumé of Assyrian history is uncertain. The important step was the demarcation of history from pre-history, and this step was more than likely occasioned by Ephorus' wider view.<sup>24</sup> Historians engrossed solely with *Hellenica* would have had less reason to question the reliability of the legends.

Diodorus Siculus, Pompeius Trogus and Nicolaus of Damascus published their universal histories between 36 B.C. and ca. 9 A.D.; all three based their Assyrian chapters on Ctesias' *Persica*. By this time mythographers and chronographers had worked out the synchronisms between Belus and Cronus, Ninus and Aegialeus, Semiramis and Europs; a universal historian could now with clear conscience set Assyrian history and the Greek legends side by side. Diodorus' Assyrian history is little more than a digest of the first three books of Ctesias' *Persica*.<sup>25</sup> The stories about Ninus, Semiramis and Ninyas, romantic as they were, contained nothing which a Greek of average intelligence would have rejected as fantastic. The relative sobriety of Assyrian history precluded a literal acceptance of the Greek myths, and it is therefore not surprising to find that Diodorus' treatment of the myths was Euhemeristic.<sup>26</sup> Diodorus set his Assyrian history apart from his continuous and chronological narrative of the post-Trojan era, remarking that Assyrian and Greek history were not the same sort of thing.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that in Diodorus' arrangement the myths are placed *after* the Assyrian stories, despite the fact that the latter had carried him to the ninth century B.C. Diodorus, it seems, was convinced that the history of Assyria, like the history of the pre-Trojan Aegean, had a rightful place in a universal history. But how these two fields of history were related to each other, and how they were related to the clearer history of later times, remained a problem. Nor was any attempt made to link the earliest Assyrians with the first generation of men. In Diodorus' history the Assyrians are chronologically fixed by the Ctesian dates, and they are presented as the

<sup>23</sup> Diodorus I, 9, 5.

<sup>24</sup> In the latter years of the fourth century, however, Zoilus of Amphipolis still found no difficulty in writing an outline of history (perhaps universal history) from the *Theogonia* to the assassination of Philip II. Nothing is known about this work except that it was quoted by practically nobody. The mentality of its author can perhaps be estimated on the basis of his better known and more widely condemned *Καθ' Ὁμήρου*.

<sup>25</sup> Diodorus II, 1-28; Goossens, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-44, argues for a late fourth century link between Ctesias and Diodorus.

<sup>26</sup> On Diodorus' use of the myths see M. Pavan, "La teoresi storica di Diodoro Siculo," *Atti della Accad. Naz. dei Lincei (Rendiconti, Classe di Sci. morali, storiche e filologiche)*, 1961, p. 23 and pp. 135-136.

<sup>27</sup> Diodorus I, 9, 5.



predecessors of the Medes; yet they are suspended in a quasi-historical limbo. No predecessor secures them to their past; 1300 years of their history contained "nothing worth mentioning"; their departure is mentioned only to clear the field for the Medes.

Better organization marked the history of Trogus. Assyria was described as the first of the great Eastern powers, and Ninus was the first man to attempt an empire. He taught the neighbors of Assyria the bitter lessons of war, and left to Semiramis an empire stretching from India to Africa.<sup>28</sup> This somewhat Promethean role of the Assyrians suggests that Trogus believed the Assyrians stood near the threshold of civilization. The Greek myths did not interest Trogus as they did Diodorus. He did, of course, accept the legendary kings of Athens at face value, and may have done the same with the still earlier Argive and Sicyonian kings. Rather successfully Trogus followed a chronological thread through the Assyrian, Median and Persian periods. His references to Greek prehistory take the form of deliberate digressions. The early history of Athens, *e.g.*, is given just before the description of Darius' campaign against Athens.<sup>29</sup>

Nicolaus included all Assyrian and Median history in the first and second of his 144 books. He backtracked in book III to tell the history of the pre-Trojan Aegean. IV and V comprised a geographical-historical survey of early Lydia, Syria and Judaea, and a similar treatment of Greece in the period immediately following the Trojan War. Here too, then, Assyrian history was separated from the history of later times by such Greek myths as the Theban cycle, the adventures of Bellerophon, the Argonauts and Heracles.<sup>30</sup>

The next step was taken by Cephalion, universal historian, contemporary of Hadrian, and resident in Sicily. His Assyrian information was derived at second hand from Ctesias. Yet there were important differences between the accounts of Cephalion and his Augustan predecessors. Diodorus, Trogus and Nicolaus had set Assyria and pre-Trojan Greece side by side, but had established few interrelations between the two. Cephalion commingled Assyrian and Greek heroes: during the reign of Belimos, 640 years after Ninus' succession, Perseus, son of Danae, arrived in Assyria, fleeing from Dionysus, son of Semele; 1000 years after the rule of Semiramis, while Metraeus ruled Assyria, Medea gave birth to Medos, progenitor of the Medes; Teutamus, successor to Metraeus, sent help to Priam during the siege of Troy, in response to a letter sent by Priam, a letter which Cephalion quoted in full.<sup>31</sup> The synthesis of Assyrian history and Greek legend had been achieved, and each was the poorer for it. An important factor in this synthesis was Cephalion's chronology: the Assyrian hegemony ended in the generation following the Trojan War, 1013 years after its inception.<sup>32</sup> Thus Assyrian history no longer overlapped the prehistoric and

<sup>28</sup> Justin I, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Justin II, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Nicolaus, FF 7-14.

<sup>31</sup> Cephalion, F 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



the historic ages of Greece, but had been made conterminous with the legendary age of Greece.<sup>33</sup> ‘

While the Assyrians slipped back through the centuries, the frontier of history was moving in the opposite direction. The coincidence of the accepted dates for the first Olympic festival, the foundation of Rome, and the establishment of the archonship at Athens seems to have suggested that the “historical” period began not with the Trojan War, but several centuries later.<sup>34</sup> An otherwise unknown Chryserus wrote what purported to be a universal history, choosing the foundation of Rome as his starting point.<sup>35</sup> Asinius Quadratus may have soothed some sensibilities and offended others by placing the foundation of Rome in the first year of the first Olympiad, his point of departure.<sup>36</sup> Dexippus of Athens made the Olympiad system the basis of his *Historical Chronicle*, for further precision referring to archons and consuls. Although he did touch on events prior to the first Olympiad, he was at pains to keep legend out of his

<sup>33</sup> The historians cited above were not alone in regarding the Assyrians as the earliest of civilized peoples. Orosius decried the fact that “...omnes propemodum tam apud Graecos quam apud Latinos studiosi ad scribendum viri, qui res gestas regum populorumque ob diuturnam memoriam verbis propagaverunt, initium scribendi a Nino Beli filio, rege Assyriorum fecere. . . . quasi vero eatenus humanum genus ritu pecudum vixerit, et tunc primum veluti ad novam providentiam concussum suscitatumque evigilarit.” (Orosius I, 6 = Migne, PL XXXI, col. 669). Bion, who wrote a universal history in the first century before Christ, Alexander Polyhistor (in his *Chaldaica*) and Aemilius Sura (*De annis populi Romani*) would have been among the historians criticized by Orosius.

<sup>34</sup> The archonship, according to tradition, was established at Athens in 753 B.C., and became an annual office in 682 B.C. Traditional dates for the foundation of Carthage (812 B.C.), the inauguration of the Spartan ephorate (753 B.C.), and the earliest Greek settlement of the West (733 B.C.) may also have been regarded as indicative of the dawn of a new era. Varro, who knew Euhemerus’ doctrines through Ennius’ translation, and whose chronology was derived in part from Castor’s *Chronicle*, divided the past into three periods: primum ab hominum principio ad cataclysmum priorem, quod propter ignorantiam vocatur adelon, secundum a cataclysmo priore ad olympiadem primam, quod, quia multa in eo fabulosa referuntur, mythicon nominatur, tertium a prima olympiade ad nos, quod dicitur historicon, quia res in eo gestae veris historiis continentur. primum tempus, sive habuit initium seu semper fuit, certe quot annorum sit, non potest comprehendere. secundum non plane scitur, sed tamen ad mille circiter et sescentos annos esse creditur (Varro, F 3). According to Varro’s schematization Assyrian history fell entirely within the “mythical” period (cf. Aug., *de Civ. Dei*, XVIII, 21). The earliest “ancient historian” was, of course, Herodotus. It is significant that his history was described as spanning 240 or 220 years, 719 or 699 to 478 B.C. (Dion. Hal., *de Thuc.* 5, 820 and *epist. ad Pom.* 3, 14). Herodotus’ references to pre-Lyidian and pre-Median history no longer counted. Julius Africanus contrasted the Greeks’ confidence in treating the history of the Olympic era with their ignorance of history before the first Olympiad (Julius Africanus F 13, 1 = Migne, PG X, col. 73).

<sup>35</sup> Jacoby (*op. cit.*, II C, p. 300) described Chryserus’ work as a universal history, with Rome as its center.

<sup>36</sup> Quadratus’ history, entitled *One Thousand Years*, apparently covered the years 776 B.C. to 224 A.D.

history.<sup>37</sup> Apparently he condensed the expanse of Egyptian antiquity but how he did this, and what he did with Assyria is unknown.

Christian writers, on the other hand, were at the same time expanding the domain of the historian. For Julius Africanus the historical period began with the Creation. The Olympic festival, Athenian archons and the city of Rome were of relatively recent date. Whereas the high chronologies of the Eastern peoples were an awkward and inexplicable quantity for pagan historians, they could provide vital support for the chronology of world history espoused by the Christians. These writers, of course, were well acquainted with the Berossean and Jewish versions of Assyrian history. But the Ctesian, or Greek tradition, was too firmly rooted to be displaced by the Eastern tradition. Eusebius combined the two by postulating two Assyrian empires: the first began with Ninus in 2057 B.C. and ended with Sardanapalus in 818 B.C.; the second empire was the one referred to by the Hebrew prophets, ushered in by Pul, or Tiglath-Pileser III, in the early eighth century, and destroyed by Cyaxeres the Mede in 623 B.C. Along with the Assyrians, the legendary Greek figures, with whom they had long been associated, were restored to History. Eusebius made Ninus and Europs contemporaries of Abraham and Egypt's sixteenth dynasty kings; Telchinus became king of Sicyon in the fourteenth year of Semiramis. Eusebius' compromise of the Ctesian and the Eastern versions of Assyrian history was adopted by his successors,<sup>38</sup> and was repeated until the nineteenth century decipherment of the cuneiform scripts discredited Ctesias and established the worthlessness of his Assyrian king-list. Ninus, Semiramis and Sardanapalus have been found to be impostors.<sup>39</sup>

Universal historians of Greece and Rome made some effort to assign the Assyrians their proper place in world history. No similar effort was made on behalf of the Egyptians. Ephorus, Trogus, Nicolaus and Cephalion seem to have done nothing with Egyptian history. Diodorus had much to say on Egyptian geography, fauna, and customs, but precious little on its history. Yet Egypt was a fabled country, with its own unbroken tradition of the past, and was visited by countless Greeks and Romans. Assyria was more remote in time and space. The inclusion of Assyria in the universal histories can only be

<sup>37</sup> "The earlier ages and, in fact, all things which belong in the realm of poetry, (Dexippus) dismissed, turning them over to the creative artist and to the author more adept at making these things plausible to the average man . . . . The mythical and the too remote he rejected, sending it back to its inventors, as though it were an old medicine found to be the work of quacks," (Dexippus F 1).

<sup>38</sup> The Ctesian tradition, however, remained much more prominent; Augustine (*de Civ. Dei* XVIII, 21) and Orosius (I 60-61 and 73-75 = Migne, PL XXXI, coll. 721 and 733 to 735) discussed only the first of Eusebius' two Assyrian empires.

<sup>39</sup> Attempts to salvage the three have centered on phonetic similarities between Ninus and Tukulti-Ninurta I, Semiramis and Sammu-ramat (the Babylonian wife of Shamshi-Adad V), and Sardanapalus and Ashurbanipal.

explained by the influence of Assyrian history upon the evolution of Greek views about pre-Trojan times, and upon the evolution and consolidation of a chronology for that period. The legendary Greek past could be made to yield reference points for Assyrian history, but fell far short of Egypt's timeless heritage. Whether Egypt's history went back 5000, 18000 or 100000 years made little difference; it could not, at any rate, be related to Greek history.<sup>40</sup> The Hellenocentric bias of Greek (and Roman) historians is thus strangely confirmed by their efforts to do justice to the Assyrians.

#### Appendix: Ctesias and Babylonian Records

It is almost certain that Babylonian records were the ultimate source of Ctesias' report of an Assyrian empire of more than 1300 years duration. In order to attack successfully Herodotus' statement that Assyrian rule had lasted 520 years, Ctesias would have been obliged to appeal to some more reliable authority. Their acceptance of Ctesias' account and their rejection of Herodotus' account suggest that later Classical historians were satisfied that Ctesias' statements on Assyria were not without foundation. Berossus corrected much of what Ctesias had said, but there is no reason to think that he disputed the claim that the Assyrian state had been in existence for *ca.* 1300 years.<sup>41</sup>

The reading and publication of Old Persian and cuneiform records convinced nineteenth century scholars that Ctesias' Assyrian history was completely unreliable. This estimate was implemented by the absence of any cuneiform records upon which Ctesias might have based his claim for a 1300 year empire.<sup>42</sup> But documents have since been found which place the problem in

<sup>40</sup> The Greeks had always taken Egyptian claims with a grain of salt. Although historians usually greeted such claims with indifference, some attempts were made to scale the Egyptian chronology down to size. According to Dicearchus (F 58, ed. Wehrli) Egyptian history began in 3719 B.C. In the *Excerpta Latina Barbari* (ed. Schöne, p. 215) it is recorded that the first of Egypt's demigod kings, Amasis, was a contemporary of the Argive Inachus. Varro did not accept the authority of the supposedly ancient Egyptian records, for, as he was convinced, the Egyptians had learned to write only 2000 years before his own time, and had learned that art from the immigrant Io, whom the Egyptians proceeded to deify as Isis (Varro F 12). On the general problem of Greek indifference to Egyptian antiquity, see Truesdell S. Brown, "The Greek Sense of Time in History as suggested by their Accounts of Egypt," *Historia* XI (1962), pp. 257-270.

<sup>41</sup> Abydenus, FF 1 and 7. Cf. Josephus, *J. A.*, I, 143 and I, 171-177.

<sup>42</sup> In a monograph entitled, *De Ctesiae Cnidii fide et auctoritate* (*Programm des evangelischen Gymnasiums zu Gütersloh*), Bielefeld, 1873, Dr. Rüter made a desperate attempt to salvage some of Ctesias' reputation, recently shattered by Rawlinson and M. Niebuhr. But this partisan restricted his efforts solely to the names of the more salient Ctesian monarchs. Concerning the more than 1300 years which Ctesias claimed for Assyria, Dr. Rüter commented (p. 22), "Attamen hos numeros Ctesianos testimoniiis certissimis repugnantes omnino reiciendos esse in animo mihi non est negare, quos jam pridem viri docti tanta cum diligentia et subtilitate refutaverunt, ut oleum ac tempus perdere videatur, qui in iis defendendis sustentandisque operam ponat. . . . Quare Berossi et Herodoti numeros,

another light.<sup>43</sup> The discoveries at Chorsabad show clearly that Assyrians of the Late Empire possessed king-lists which went back to the legendary origins of the Assyrian people.<sup>44</sup> The Chorsabad king-list catalogues 107 Assyrian kings, the last of whom is Ashur-Nirari V (754–745 B.C.). Regnal periods are included in the Chorsabad list; the first king whose regnal years were known to the compiler was Shamshi-Adad I, and regnal periods are given for all but two of his successors. Addition of the listed regnal periods places the accession of Shamshi-Adad I at 1726 B.C. (minimal date). The Chorsabad compiler knew that a still earlier king, Erishu I, ruled for 40 years, but did not know the duration of the reigns of the five kings who intervened between Erishu I and Shamshi-Adad I. An inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta I, however, places the accession of Erishu I at 1852 B.C.<sup>45</sup> It is clear that *no* records cited the regnal periods of kings earlier than Erishu I. Another compiler, in fact, who published a synchronistic chronicle of Assyrian and Babylonian history, decided that Erishu I was the first Assyrian king.<sup>46</sup>

From 1852 B.C. until the destruction of Nineveh (612 B.C.) 1240 years elapsed. Eusebius says that, according to Castor, the Assyrian empire lasted 1240 years.<sup>47</sup> It would be contrary to all reason to assume as mere coincidence the agreement of Castor's calculation with a calculation based on the Assyrians' own records. *Castor's figure for the duration of the Assyrian empire, 1240 years, unquestionably originated in Assyria itself.* Although Castor listed thirty-three Assyrian kings while Ctesias knew only of thirty, Castor's debt to the *Persica*

quorum ille ad annum a. Chr. 1273, hic ad medium saeculum XIII. dominationis Assyriorum initium refert, pro veris habendos numerisque Ctesianis longe antefereudos esse libere fatemur." Assyriologists had not, in 1873, found any Assyrian inscription which could with certainty be dated earlier than the ninth century B.C.

<sup>43</sup> The reconstruction of early Assyrian history has, essentially, been accomplished within the last half century. Since Otto Schroeder published his *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts* (Leipzig, 1920), the names of 33 more Assyrian kings have come to light, and a chronology for the Early Kingdom has been fairly well established; cf. Essad Nassouhi, "Grande liste des rois d'Assyrie," *Archiv für Orientforschung* IV (1927), pp. 1–11, E. Weidner, "Die neue Königsliste aus Assur," pp. 12–17 in the same volume, and I. J. Gelb, "Two Assyrian King Lists," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XIII (1954), pp. 209–230.

<sup>44</sup> A. Poebel, "The Assyrian King List from Khorsabad," *J.N.E.S.* I (1942), pp. 247–306 and 460–492, and II (1943), pp. 56–90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 297–302.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 282–283. The dates of the earliest Assyrian kings are still uncertain, but there are grounds for confidence in asserting that, according to the Assyrians' own tradition, 1852 B.C. was the first fixed date in their annals. An inscription of Shalmaneser I quoted the time elapsed between the accession of Shamshi-Adad I and his own accession date (1272 B.C.) as 580 years. Benno Landsberger, "Assyrische Königsliste und 'Dunkles Zeitalter,'" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* VIII (1954), pp. 36–41, has brought into harmony several traditions, each resulting in the year 1852 B.C. as the accession year of Shamshi-Adad I. That date, whether ascribed to Erishu I or Shamshi-Adad I, was consistently used by later monarchs as the point from which to measure their own place in Assyrian history.

<sup>47</sup> Castor F 1 = Armenian version of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, pp. 26, 8 to 32, 15 (tr. Karst).

has never been questioned.<sup>48</sup> Ctesias' slightly higher figure, "more than 1300 years," may reflect a Babylonian chronicler's attempt to include the kings who preceded Erishu I, whose names alone were known; or, if 1852 is to be understood as the accession of Shamshi-Adad I, the chronicler may have approximated the time intervening between Erishu I and Shamshi-Adad I.

When Ctesias went to Persia his ideas on Median and Persian history were essentially those published by Herodotus. His rejection of Herodotus' history of the Medes, and his retrojection of Median history to 866 B.C. perhaps resulted from his researches in the "royal leather record-books,"<sup>49</sup> or from his casual conversations with Persians at the King's court, or, less commendably, from his desire to flatter his hosts by giving them more than their fair share of the past.

At any rate, the origin of the Median empire must have been set by Ctesias before he approached the less important problem, the duration of the preceding Assyrian empire. If the Assyrian king lists are at the bottom of his "more than 1300 years," Ctesias came across a tradition which attributed to the Assyrians an empire of such duration, but which had not anchored these 1300 years by fixed dates at either end. Ctesias simply prefixed the period of Assyrian hegemony to his date for the establishment of the Median hegemony.

But this is not the only possibility. He may have encountered a tradition which insisted on a definite date for the beginning of Assyrian history (and, less probably, also a date for its end). His procedure in that case would have been the reverse: he subtracted the period of the Medo-Persian hegemony from the total time elapsed since this first fixed date of Assyrian history, and so calculated the duration of the Assyrian empire. In so doing he would have dismissed, if he ever knew, the traditional date for the fall of Assyria, but this he could have done without scruple. There was one hegemony of Asia, and if the Medes held it it was obvious that the Assyrians did not. If Ctesias did calculate the duration of the Assyrian empire in such a manner, the Assyrian king lists could have played no part in his reckoning, for none of them can be made to yield a fixed date "more than 1300 years" before 866 B.C.

It has been shown that Ctesias visited Babylon.<sup>50</sup> The population of Babylon was never fond of the Persians and some malcontent may have reminded Ctesias that Mesopotamian history was far more impressive than was the heritage of the Medes and the Persians. The informant would certainly have

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Jacoby, *s.v.* Ctesias, *R. E.* XI, col. 2048. The chronologies of Abydenus and Castor should also be compared. According to Castor (F 1) Sardanapalus died in 863/2 B.C., but after him a second Ninus, in some respects a king, held Assyria together until 844/3 B.C. Abydenus, who also, according to one tradition (F 5), made Sardanapalus the second last instead of the last Assyrian king, dated the fall of Assyria to 843 B.C. (F 7). Cf. note 13 concerning Abydenus' dependence on Ctesias.

<sup>49</sup> Diodorus II, 32, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Goossens, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, pointed out the striking similarity between Ctesias' "Palace of Semiramis" and Robert Koldewey's "Südburg."

claimed the achievements of the Assyrians as an imposing element in Mesopotamian history, perhaps as the dominant element. However that may be, a strong case can be made for tracing to the same tradition Ctesias' date for the origin of Assyria's empire and Berossus' date for the beginning of non-mythical history at Babylon.

According to the manuscript reading of Diodorus II, 21, 8, the Assyrian empire was overthrown by the Medes, *ἐτη διαμείνασα πλείω τῶν χιλίων καὶ τριακοσίων ἔτι δ' ἐξήκοντα, καθάπερ φησὶ Κτησίας ὁ Κνίδιος ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ βίβλῳ*. Dindorf deleted the words, *ἔτι δ' ἐξήκοντα*, after comparing this passage with Diodorus II, 28, 8, where it is stated that the Assyrian empire lasted more than 1300 years. Dindorf's deletion has generally been accepted. G. Goossens, however, retaining the manuscript reading, has shown a close correspondence between the resultant Ctesian date, 2227 B.C., and Berossus' date for "le début de l'histoire," 2232 B.C.<sup>51</sup> This correspondence can be tightened still more, if the coup of Cyrus the Great is to be dated to 549 instead of 550 B.C.,<sup>52</sup> Ctesias' date for the birth of Assyria will be 2226 B.C. There is ample reason, on the other hand, to revise the Berossian date for the first human dynasty at Babylon. Subtraction of the 34,091 years which Berossus allotted to the first post-diluvian dynasty at Babylon from the total of 36,000 years which he reckoned had elapsed between the Flood and the death of Alexander leaves 1909 years for the non-mythical dynasties; or, in other words, the second dynasty at Babylon, that of the Mari kings, began to rule in 2232 B.C.<sup>53</sup> But it should be pointed out that the better manuscript reading assigns 33,091 years to the first dynasty; that reading would drop the inaugural date of the second dynasty to 3232 B.C. Because of this ambiguity it may be preferable to start from the opposite end: Berossus listed the five dynasties which followed the first post-diluvian dynasty and which preceded the dynasty of Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III):

Mari kings	224 years
Eleven kings	28 years
Chaldaeian kings	458 years
Arabian kings	245 years
45 kings	526 years
Total:	<hr/> 1481 years

Tiglath-Pileser III took over the Assyrian throne in 745 B.C. If Berossus had that event in mind, and not the same king's capture of Babylon, his date for the origin of the Mari dynasty would be 2226 B.C.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Goossens, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Forsdyke, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>53</sup> Berossus F 5 = Arm. version of Euseb. *Chron.*, pp. 12, 17 to 13, 18 (tr. Karst). C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, "Neue Studien zu Berossos," *Klio* XXII (1929), p. 144, arrived in this way at the date 2232 B.C.

<sup>54</sup> Lehmann-Haupt assumed that the non-mythical dynasties spanned 1909 years, and that the last dynasty reached to Alexander's death. He was, accordingly, forced to predicate



Ctesias' statement that there were thirty kings in the Assyrian dynastic succession<sup>55</sup> may also result from a Babylonian twist to the Assyrian tradition. Of the scores of Assyrian kings who ruled before the Late Empire, only two are likely to have impressed themselves on the Babylonian national memory, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1242–1206 B.C.) and Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.). Tukulti-Ninurta I was the first Assyrian king to conquer Babylon; he deported the statue of Marduk and maintained Assyrian sovereignty in Babylon for a number of years. The Assyrians did not return to Babylon until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I, almost a century and a half later. This too was a brief occupation. Tiglath-Pileser I plundered the palace but spared the temples. From the death of Tiglath-Pileser I until the accession of Ashur-dan II in 932 B.C. Assyria was too weak to menace Babylon.

Some Babylonian record, then, may well have listed Tukulti-Ninurta I as the first king of Assyria. From this monarch through Ashur-Nirari V thirty kings occupied the Assyrian throne. Ashur-Nirari V was the last king to appear on the Chorsabad king list. More important, his successor, Tiglath-Pileser III, was the third Assyrian king to conquer Babylon, and was the first to depict himself as two kings of two different peoples: as king of Babylon he was Pul, as king of Assyria he was Tiglath-Pileser. Patriotic tradition in Babylon may have presented Pul and his successors as Babylonian, not Assyrian kings. The Babylonian tradition which recognized only 30 Assyrian kings may thus have referred to the 30 kings from Tukulti-Ninurta I through Ashur-Nirari V. That Ctesias' first Assyrian king, Ninus, may be a much corrupted and hellenized form of Tukulti-Ninurta, has already been mentioned.

It is, however, more probable that the "30 Assyrian kings" refer to Tiglath-Pileser I and his 29 successors. The twenty-ninth successor to Tiglath-Pileser I was Ashur-uballit II, the last of all the Assyrian kings.

It is both impossible and unnecessary to trace the transmission, garbling and combination of these various traditions. The important conclusion is that Ctesias must have advised his readers that his disquieting information on the antiquity of Assyria was, in one way or another, obtained from Babylonian records.

a seventh dynasty,<sup>1</sup> and to do away with Berossus' statement that the dynasty of the 45 kings was followed by the dynasty of Pul. Lehmann-Haupt argued that at least one entire sentence was lost in the transmission of the Armenian chronicle, a sentence in which Berossus has subdivided the dynasty of the 45 kings into several smaller groups; it was one of these smaller groups, Lehmann-Haupt contended, which preceded Pul; the dynasty in its entirety lasted from 850 (849) until 324 (323) B.C. This argument implies that Berossus, the Chaldaean, lumped together in one disreputable hodge-podge Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldaean and Persian monarchs.

<sup>55</sup> Diodorus II, 28, 8.

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